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*When you pick up a ringing phone and hear silence at the other end, it can be frightening. However, most of these calls are made not by villains but by computers at call centres. Now in the UK such centres could be fined up to £2m for causing distress. Gavin Ramjaun reports:*

It's an annoying thing many households have **to put up with** - answering the phone to find nobody on the other end of the line. They are often from a company's call centre which uses **automatic dialling** in the hope of selling you something. But if there aren't enough **staff on hand** to speak, the call into your home stays silent. Industry regulator, Ofcom, says it's **a breach of their guidelines** for businesses who make persistent unwanted phone calls. And now those **caught** breaking the law could face fines of £2m.

*Kevin Brennan, Consumer Affairs Minister:* 'It is still a real problem, despite the raising of fines that have gone on in the past. Last year, Ofcom did a survey and found that half of people that they surveyed said that it was **a real nuisance** to them.'

*David Hickson, campaigner:* 'We don't know **how much of a deterrent** it will be. The point is that the action point of Ofcom should be to stop people from making silent calls, not just **to penalise** them.'

Despite previous attempts **to tackle** this, almost half of the UK still receives silent phone calls. So officials will hope the threat of a bigger fine can help **stamp it out**.

Gavin Ramjaun, BBC News

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>to put up with</b>	to accept something even though you are not happy about it, to be forced to tolerate
<b>automatic dialling</b>	when a computerised device, called a predictive dialler, is used by call centres to phone a lot of people in one go
<b>staff on hand</b>	company employees available
<b>a breach of their guidelines</b>	when their official recommendations are broken
<b>caught</b>	here, noticed or reported
<b>a real nuisance</b>	annoying and/or irritating them a great deal
<b>how much of a deterrent</b>	how effective in preventing silent calls
<b>to penalise</b>	to punish for breaking a law
<b>to tackle</b>	to deal with/resolve
<b>stamp it out</b>	if you <b>stamp</b> something <b>out</b> , you put an end to it/eradicate it

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